

# OPINION

## Living in the middle of the country's frozen food section

January is the perfect time to get a good deal on a Christmas tree.

January is when we realize Canada's major exports are cold fronts.

I have a favorite cereal bowl. It's plain in color. It might be beige. It has no cartoon characters on it. I like bowls better than bowl games. Here's a tip for you, never order a plate of soup. I'd just polished off a bowl of oatmeal when a caller asked, "How's it going?"

Questions don't get much more complicated than that. I told him I was still amazed by carbon paper. I nodded sagely after saying that. The caller couldn't see me, so I had to tell him I was nodding sagely. I added what Charles Lamb said, "New Year's Day is everyman's birthday." I nodded sagely once more. He (the caller, not Charles Lamb) asked if I'd made any resolutions. Last year, I made three New Year's resolutions. Never buy shoes that aren't comfortable, save good cardboard boxes and spend more time at home. I bought no footwear, I squirreled away several dandy boxes and the pandemic tethered me to the Batt Cave. Woot woot! I'm all dressed down with nowhere to go. This year, I've resolved to not get gout from eating boiled pig snout.

I suspect a higher-than-usual number of people stayed up to welcome 2021. Probably not to see the new year in, but to make sure 2020 left. 2020 had a desperate need for attention. In Spain, they recommend not abusing a year until it has passed. In Iceland, a good year is always welcome. L.P. Hartley wrote, "The past is a foreign country; they do things differently there."

January is where pessimism can blossom. A fair day in winter is the mother of a storm. A nice winter day is a borrowed day, to be repaid with interest later. Folklore has some validity, but can be like amateur taxi-dermy. It's difficult to identify.

The month of January is like a gentleman — as he begins, so he goes on. The weather of the first 12 days of January forecasts the weather for the next 12 months. Jan. 2 portends the weather in February, Jan. 3 foretells the March weather, etc. A January fog will freeze a hog or a dog or both.

If New Year's Eve the wind blows south, it betokens warmth and growth. If west, much milk and fish in the sea.



Tales from Exit 22  
By Al Batt

If north, cold and storms there will be. If east, the trees will bear much fruit. If northeast, then flee it, man and brute. If this doggerel doesn't provide the forecast you want, have a do-over on New Year's Day.

Ezvid Wiki, a video, software and media company, polled 3,000 people to find out which month of the year is the gloomiest. Minnesotans overwhelmingly voted January as the worst month of the year in the misery index. Ezvid Wiki analyzed 36 years of weather data to identify the statistically coldest and wettest day in January — it's the 8th.

The National Retail Federation estimates that around \$309 billion worth of merchandise was returned in 2019, accounting for about 8% of total sales. An estimated two-thirds of gifttees return an item. That Federation expects 13% of gifts bought during the 2020 holiday season will be returned. I'm better at regifting than returning.

I remember being a lad with a driver's license. A cow had told me the weather would be fair. I shouldn't have listened to her. Most cows are as honest as the winter is long, but this one was a chronic liar. If cows could predict the weather, we'd see them on The Weather Channel. I was driving home in a January storm. I had no hat, comforted to know we lose 7 to 10% of body heat through the top of our heads. The head doesn't disproportionately lose more than any other uncovered area of the body. I should have pulled over and sat out the blizzard, but I was a lad with a driver's license. I knew if I could just make it home, everything would be OK. I made it home and everything was OK.

Bob Dylan wrote, "May God bless and keep you always. May your wishes all come true. May you always do for others. And let others do for you. May you build a ladder to the stars. And climb on every rung. May you stay forever young."

That's my wish for you. And that everything will be OK.

Al Batt's columns appear every Wednesday.

### TRIBUNE EDITORIAL

## THE NEW YEAR BRINGS A NEEDED TIME TO REFRESH

With the start of the new year, there are now many new faces in the political world, from school boards all the way up to the Minnesota Legislature.

Oftentimes, getting new blood into these roles can introduce new ideas and new methods in order to work for the people who put you there — the voters.

It's an exciting moment for those taking up these important roles as they exercise their positions to enact those things that will benefit those people they are representing.

However, it should be observed that they are coming into a difficult position. For many of these people, especially on the state level, there has rarely been such an extreme disconnect between elected officials than there is now.

The gulf between Republican and Democrat seems

“The gulf between Republican and Democrat seems as if it has never been wider, and in turn the responsibility on newly elected officials has never been so hefty.”

as if it has never been wider and in turn the responsibility on newly elected officials has never been so hefty.

Voting along party lines is almost a guarantee any more as ideologies control more than constituent wellbeing.

Perhaps it isn't so prevalent at the local levels, but our advice is the same. Remember the voters and their voices — all of them. You may be part of a party, but with the words, "I represent the constituents in my area," you are vowing to represent everybody.

There will always be a

party divide, but simply voting for a party will ensure that the divide continues.

When you said the oath of office, we hope you agreed to represent the voice of all voters, not just those who voted for you.

A new year offers new opportunities, and while we congratulate those new public officers, we also hope that they have the vision to see further than the lines that separate. It's important that you listen to each person that voices concerns, who is frustrated or angry.

You are our voice. It's time to listen.

## Anybody else ready for school to start up?

This winter break has been a long one. With school being on distance learning before the break and then the break being extended to allow teachers extra time to prepare to go back to in-person learning, it seems like it has been a long time since my son was in the classroom.

I thought distance learning went about as well as it could have for my energetic son — his teacher and paras had multiple check-ins online each day through Google Meets and there were regular online visits with his speech and occupational therapists as well. While he looked forward to talking to his teachers and classmates each school day and he continued learning, there's nothing quite like being in the classroom.

I was thrilled when it was announced that students who had chosen in-person learning could return to their schools on Monday.

My son, Landon, still doesn't understand what is happening with the pandemic. He doesn't understand why



Nose for News  
By Sarah Stultz

his routine keeps changing, why he has been talking to his teachers and classmates through an iPad instead of seeing them in-person at the school, and he still doesn't understand why we have to wear masks when we're out in public places — but he is getting better at it!

Though he has adjusted to the distance learning format, there's still no question that he prefers school in-person.

Every day for the last two weeks, he has asked about going back to school, and every day I have had to tell him he will be going back in a few weeks. This week, I can shift to how many days it will be until he can return.

To say he can't wait is an

understatement. He has thrived in the in-person school setting, and I can't wait to see him continue to grow — academically, socially and emotionally.

As we gear up for this second half of the school year and many students return to the in-person format on Monday, I hope we all can remember still to practice patience.

Our teachers have all been working diligently to shift their learning models already multiple times since the start of the pandemic, and as much as we all want things to return back to the way things were before March of 2020, things will still be different.

Let's all do our best to protect ourselves and others in whatever way we can so our students can stay in school for the remainder of the year.

We owe it to ourselves, but more importantly, we owe it to them.

Sarah Stultz is the managing editor of the Tribune. Her column appears every Wednesday.

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## Building back better is a priority for 2021

The year 2020, defined by a deadly and relentless pandemic, has been devastating for people in Minnesota and across the country whose lives, jobs, health and safety continue to be upended by COVID-19.

As we look ahead to 2021, addressing the fallout from the coronavirus — which has already taken more than 350,000 American lives, including 5,300 Minnesotans — continues to be a priority. I'll be a strong partner with local officials and health leaders across the state and as we continue to help the families, communities, and businesses which have been hit hard by the on-going health and economic crisis.

The authorization of two coronavirus vaccines in December gives us hope that the end of the pandemic is in sight. Now the country must not only build trust in the vaccines but also begin the largest, most costly mass vaccination effort in history.

To ensure Minnesota is prepared, I'm pressing the nation's top health officials to provide \$134 million to our state and tribal governments, and local health leaders, to help cover the cost of getting the vaccine quickly and safely rolled out. Earlier this year, I introduced legislation to ensure vaccines are distributed fairly, equitably and free to everyone regardless of insurance status. I'll continue to press the Trump Administration and the incoming Biden Administration to make that happen.

It will take many months to get vaccines to a majority



Guest Column  
By Tina Smith

of Americans, so Minnesotans still need to use the tools that protect us from the virus: masking up, social distancing and getting tested when exposed or sick.

One of my greatest frustrations during the pandemic has been the lack of a national testing strategy, so I was pleased Congress responded by including in its year-end budget parts of my bipartisan measure to allow states to form partnerships to secure adequate testing. Testing will continue to be important while the vaccine is rolled out; we can't lose sight of that.

#### Helping Minnesota build back better

During the challenges of the past year, it was inspiring to see local Minnesota leaders and businesses step up to help their communities and help produce and procure the personal protective equipment and supplies that our health providers so badly needed in the early days of the crisis. In 2021, I'll continue to help communities and businesses build back better in several ways.

One is by working with local officials and the new Biden administration to invest in infrastructure. As communities around the state begin

to invest in building back, I'll continue to be an advocate for important projects that fuel jobs and economic development.

Part of that effort includes my continued push to expand rural broadband to give our businesses, no matter where they are located, the ability to create jobs and to allow health care providers to expand use of telehealth to treat patients for both physical and mental health issues.

I'll also fight to expand affordable housing and the significant economic and social benefits it generates. Virtually every Minnesota community is facing a shortage of quality, affordable housing that hurts families and businesses, and stifles job creation and economic development. We have to address this shortage because we know that if you don't have safe, stable housing, nothing else in your life can work.

As I travel across Minnesota, people often tell me their top concern is the cost of prescription drugs and health care. I've passed measures to bring down the cost of medications, including insulin, and I'll continue this fight as we move into the new year.

Minnesota families, businesses and communities have shown resilience during this challenging past year. In 2021, I plan to continue to partner with Minnesotans as we work to bring people together and build back better.

DFL Sen. Tina Smith represents Minnesota in the U.S. Senate.



Send a letter to the editor.

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**THE FIRST AMENDMENT:** Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances.



# How to call 911 when you can't talk or type

*Question: I was wondering if you could address what someone, such as my spouse, should do if needing to call 911 and cannot speak or type as both of those abilities are impaired. We've been thinking about getting a medical alert system.*



**Ask a Trooper**  
**By Troy Christianson**

For your situation, I would recommend reaching out to the 911 call center manager that would receive the call in your jurisdiction. The computer-aided dispatch system premise file database might be able to flag a phone number, or provide other helpful information with an address that will provide background information to alert the 911 call taker if they receive a call with an open line from a specific number. This would assume you are normally at home, and the person who is

not able to speak or text uses a single wireless phone.

From my experience, 911 call centers are very willing to work with citizens within their jurisdiction who feel they need additional support when a 911 call is placed and someone is not able to communicate.

You can avoid a ticket — and a crash — if you simply buckle up, drive at safe speeds, pay attention and always drive sober. Help us drive Minnesota toward zero deaths.

If you have any questions concerning traffic-related laws or issues in Minnesota, send your questions to Sgt. Troy Christianson, Minnesota State Patrol, at 2900 48th St. NW, Rochester, MN 55901-5848; or reach him at Troy.Christianson@state.mn.us.

*Troy Christianson is a sergeant with the Minnesota State Patrol.*

## MY POINT OF VIEW

# Regionally and locally, we're all ready for the year 2021



**My Point of View**  
**By Robert Hoffman**

Albert Lea and Freeborn County are doing a great job. We are a county full of beautiful communities and communities full of outstanding leadership. Like celebrating the new year, it is empowering to carry over successes and exciting to look forward to some new beginnings.

It is not said enough, but should almost be engraved in stone, a special thank you to Sheriff Kurt Freitag. Sheriff Freitag is our most senior leader of our county, and under his leadership only the best is good enough for Freeborn County. We are very thankful for Sheriff Freitag's leadership into the new year and are blessed to have him serving.

New leaders in the county have emerged and start their service soon. Three new county commissioners, Brad Edwin, John Forman and Ted Herman, will serve with the two county commissioners not up for reelection. This team will offer a new dynamic to our county's leadership that will be beneficial to all of Freeborn County.

Re-elected Congressman Jim Hagedorn earned another term as our U.S. representative to southern Minnesota in Washington, D.C. Jim is making cancer an opponent that won't run against him again as well. We wish him all our best and thank him for all his service. Congressman Hagedorn was the clear choice and decisive winner in his reelection and his amazing immediacy with Albert Lea and Freeborn County helped earn him the well-deserved re-election.

Also reelected was our state representative serving in St. Paul and simply put, a favorite local hometown hero, Peggy Bennett. Representative Bennett starts her next term in leadership roles she has earned at the state level because of the trust she has earned by the entire state House of Representatives.

Brand new state Rep. Patty Mueller (that serves mainly Mower County but does serve some of southeastern Freeborn County as well) and our new state Sen. Gene Dornink are welcomed new additions to the state House and state Senate. Both Patty and Gene have proven, through their winning campaigns, that they are the change we wish to see representing southern Minnesota in the House and Senate. We are in good hands and led by God's hands with these two new leaders.

The Albert Lea City Council did not see changes to the councilmen serving, and they are continued to be led by Mayor Vern Rasmussen. Vern's heart has been with Albert Lea since serving on the City Council before being elected and reelected as our mayor. However, just before the new year Albert Lea was blessed to have a new city manager begin his service in our community. City Manager Ian Rigg's new leadership and the continued veteran leadership of the City Council will guide our

beautiful community and together help lead southern Minnesota through all that lies ahead. We can be an example of what a well led small community can do.

No community can thrive without care given to its students, schools and especially teachers being taken care of. A lot has been learned in many new ways in our schools lately. Applying new protocols and formats to education is much like starting a new year and carrying over what has been successful while also trying out new ideas. In the same light, the Albert Lea school board elections did exactly that.

Neal Skaar a longtime, former teacher and very respected incumbent school board member was re-elected to the school board and Bruce Olson, a retired school district employee is one of the new school board members. Interestingly in what may be the first time ever, anywhere, in the history-of-ever, small business owner and local property investor Angie Hoffman received the most votes out of any nonincumbent candidate from a very strong pool of seven great candidates vying for the three open school board positions. Angie Hoffman became well known for being the candidate who was "homeschooled" and "doesn't have kids." Angie is an exciting and nontraditional addition to an important school board team in a time of unprecedented decisions being made.

Albert Lea and Freeborn County have also had new business leaders emerge. It is now a new year when there is no longer time to just take a knee anymore. It is time to stand up for all small businesses, owners and especially their employees. Albert Lea's Lisa and Vern Hanson, owners of the Interchange coffee shop and Freeborn County's Bruce and Jennie Nielsen, owners of the Pour House Bar & Grill, have helped keep the open-sign on for southern Minnesota small businesses. They led an amazing march on Sunday in Albert Lea and showed that standing up for businesses who choose to be open is simply the right thing to do. God bless these small business owners, their employees and all like them reaching for the on-switch to their open-signs.

Albert Lea and Freeborn County, we are doing a great job! Happy new year.

*Robert Hoffman is the vice chairman of the Freeborn County DFL Party.*

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

### Consider evidence of Trump's claims

President Trump's own Voter Integrity Commission, which investigated voter fraud in the 2016 election, reported in 2018 that they found no evidence of voter fraud.

The conservative Heritage Foundation found evidence of 136 cases of voter fraud over the last 20 years. That works out to approximately three cases of voter fraud in each state over those 20 years. The passionate supporters of "Stop the Steal" in Freeborn County, may want to take a moment to consider the evidence about President Trump's claims.

**Lynne Lent**  
Albert Lea

### Voters, gov't judges rejected sedition

The Minnesota GOP congressional delegation of Hagedorn, Stauber and Emmer voted in favor of urging Americans to overthrow by force the constitutionally elected presidential vote. Does this mean the Minnesota GOP accepts being labeled the party of sedition? Locally?

I went to witness what the GOP folks were up to at their 2019 Minnesota State Fair booth. An 11-year-old boy was standing in the front of a life-size cardboard cutout of Trump and Pence. Both of this child's thumbs were enthusiastically pointed up while his smiling father took the picture. I saw a father and his boy in teaching and learning mode.

Had this boy been catechized to covet becoming a celebrity so that he can approach women and physically abuse them, to believe the white race is the superior race to be led by white race authoritarian rule over all other races, to believe that loving same sex couples are an abomination, and to believe the Arab peoples religions must be demonized?

This boy is in need of a responsible society to teach him truth, empathy, to covet intellect over ignorance and especially to reject his learned racism. To teach this boy that our U.S. government judges saved democracy by ruling time and time again against erecting an ethno-nationalist and fascist state.

It is fair to write this boy was taught to deny the science. Taught to not heed DFL Attorney General Ellison's words for those who openly violate our Governor's Executive Order 20-99: "Unfortunately, a very small handful are threatening their customers, their workers and their communities by refusing to comply and violating the law. Their insistence on violating the law is simply prolonging the pain of the pandemic for everyone." Openly super-spreading the virus is a bad example for 11-year-old girls and boys.

Democracy saved us. The presidential vote outcome is real. The reality for 11-year-old girls and boys, plus soon to be 18-year-old voters, is the reality of starting Jan. 20, Joe Biden and Kamala Harris will be sworn in as the

democratically elected president and vice president of the United States of America.

To all of the local GOP leaders — you are very very welcome. Voters and government judges rejected sedition.

**Ted Hinnenkamp**  
Albert Lea

### Let's stop with the personal attacks

I usually don't respond to the DFL columns, but after being told by one of Jennifer Vogt-Erickson's supporters that I needed to be put "on a short leash," I felt I needed to. I know Jennifer agrees with that statement because she liked a Facebook comment that said the exact same thing, where I was referred to as "that one." In response to Jennifer's column, Jennifer, you weren't banned from writing due to any GOP involvement, you were banned because you weren't following the rules given to both county parties for the columns. Specifically, the rule that it had to be local. This rule is no longer enforced; I can only assume because it became too much for the hardworking people at the Tribune to police all the DFL columns. I know this is why you were banned because after your banishment both county parties were reminded of the rules so we didn't make the same mistakes. Please stop creating fake incidents of canceling to try to prove a point when members of the county DFL have tried very aggressively to cancel three of our four board members. These attempts included pretending to be Tribune staff, badgering our superiors (both professional and political) and leaving fake Google reviews despite never being a client for the business in question. In fact, contrary to your belief, Republicans love when you write your columns!

Next, you claim Hinnenkamp's letter was calling President Trump a "bad" role model for students. In his letter, written four days after my column, Hinnenkamp references "local GOP leadership," "GOP conservative," and "a young man GOP conservative." I wouldn't describe President Trump as "young" or "local." In Hinnenkamp's letter, he claims that the "young man GOP conservative" believes "he can grab any woman by her crotch." That accusation is insulting, untrue and insinuates that I have done something so heinous and is the epitome of why our politics are so toxic. As for accusing me of defamation, you'll notice, Jennifer, that in my column I didn't name anyone. You were the first person to name Hinnenkamp and his letter.

Jennifer, the relationship used to be fantastic between our two county parties; even our chairs were friends. Let's get back to that and stop with the personal attacks. I acknowledge that I and my party have not always done that ourselves, but let's start. You believe your party to be the party of tolerance — prove it. I believe my party to be the party of civility — I'll prove it. Let's act like adults and focus on the issues our voters care about rather than attack

each other personally. I'd like to say this is resolved, but I guess we'll see in next week's paper.

**Aaron Farris**  
Albert Lea

### It's time to restore beautiful Albert Lea

Sunday I was among the hundreds marching in our great city for the freedoms of being an American. Under God's wonderful blue sky and glowing sun, the marchers shouted freedom's slogans as they waved the Stars and Stripes of the USA. Thanks to the leaders who recognized our veterans and praised law enforcement, referred to our Constitution of the United States, recited our Pledge of Allegiance and recognized with a prayer of thanksgiving while pleading for guidance from our God on whom this nation is founded. These were the themes on which I was raised, learned in a classroom with teachers who had actually studied the founding of our nation based on Biblical principles.

Last week, early in the morning, I watched a book report on CSPAN. Sadly, tuning into the middle of the program, I did not get the title and author of the book. However, those chosen to give oral reviews agreed it is necessary to make sure our kids are not taught that Jesus is the way to heaven but reporting "there are many ways." Parents, beware of what is being taught in our schools. Some of our grandchildren in a city only 60 miles away have been taught this. As a grandmother, I'm intensely speaking with them, giving them actual events that occurred during Biblical times, giving personal testimonials of God's direction in my life, praying for and coaching them of truths to believe.

Questions overheard: One asked, "Where's the mayor? Have any of you seen the city council members or county commissioners? An encouraging person interjected, "Perhaps our elected officials are secluded somewhere searching for new industries to locate here and rescue our city and county." Though the conversation was in jest, maybe these questions could be forwarded to our local officials. What happened to the company that planned to build a plant to make cereals and snacks with location to be on Hershey Street?

Albert Lea is a beautiful city along the southern tier of Minnesota. It's sad that the loss of companies, during the past couple of decades, has lowered the tax base to cover all that's needed. The rise of household taxes in the past two years has brought gasps among homeowners. Our sons found it necessary to relocate due to the lack of jobs. Others are saying they, too, regret having children leave due to the loss of available opportunities.

Citizens, it's time to make a plea to our elected officials to make greater efforts to prospective industries to restore our beautiful Albert Lea.

**Carol Bybee**  
Albert Lea

## HOW TO SEND A LETTER

Send letters via mail to Letters to the Editor, Albert Lea Tribune, 808 W. Front St., Albert Lea, MN 56007, or via email to letters@albertleatribune.com. Letters cannot exceed 500 words. They must have one author. Petitions are not printed. Letters must include address and telephone number for verification purposes — only your name and city of residence will be printed. Each author may write one letter per calendar week. Letters are published as soon as space allows. To request a guest column, contact Managing Editor Sarah Stultz at 379-3433. Feel free to call if you don't see your letter.

## QUOTATIONS IN THE NEWS

"It is something that you have never seen before. ... We have run out of coffins, we have run out of space at the mortuary. We normally have cremations during the day, but now we have cremations even at night." — *National Funeral Practitioners Association of South Africa President Muzi Hlengwa about how undertakers in the area are struggling to cope with the rise in COVID-19 deaths.*

"I know we all — we all got our doubts about the last election. And I want to assure you, I share the concerns of millions of Americans about voting irregularities. And I promise you, come this Wednesday, we'll have our day in Congress. We'll hear the objections. We'll hear the evidence." — *Vice President Mike Pence ahead of the congressional tally of Electoral College votes on Wednesday.*

"I hope that our great vice president comes through for us. He's a great guy. Of course, if he doesn't come through, I won't like him quite as much. No, Mike is a great guy." — *President Donald Trump ahead of the Wednesday joint session of Congress in which congressional members will tally Electoral College votes.*

"The weeks ahead will be the hardest yet, but I really do believe that we are entering the last phase of the struggle. Because with every jab that goes into our arms, we are tilting the odds against COVID and in favor of the British people." — *British Prime Minister Boris Johnson on Monday when announcing a new stay-at-home order for England that is expected to be in place at least through mid-February.*